

How new programs help veterans reconnect after service

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Dr William T. Howe from Texas Tech University outlines recent developments in reintegration and communication among United States military veterans

Service in the United States Military (USM) presents significant challenges as the USM transforms ordinary citizens into a cohesive fighting force through structured turning points (Howe & Hinderaker, 2018). This transformation is underpinned by decades of research and careful refinement of communication strategies used by drill sergeants and instructors. These strategies are crucial in fostering a value-oriented military identity among recruits. The entry training process has two primary aims: to instruct new service members in essential military combat skills and to unify individuals from diverse backgrounds into a single combat unit. Through this rigorous training, the military intentionally cultivates a distinct culture and identity that mandates adherence to established professional and organizational communication standards (Shpeer & Howe, 2020). This comprehensive training equips recruits with critical combat skills and instills core values such as discipline, teamwork, and loyalty to their unit and country. By enhancing a cohesive identity among recruits, the military lays a strong foundation for effective communication within its ranks, ensuring all service members share a common understanding necessary for collaborative efforts toward shared objectives.

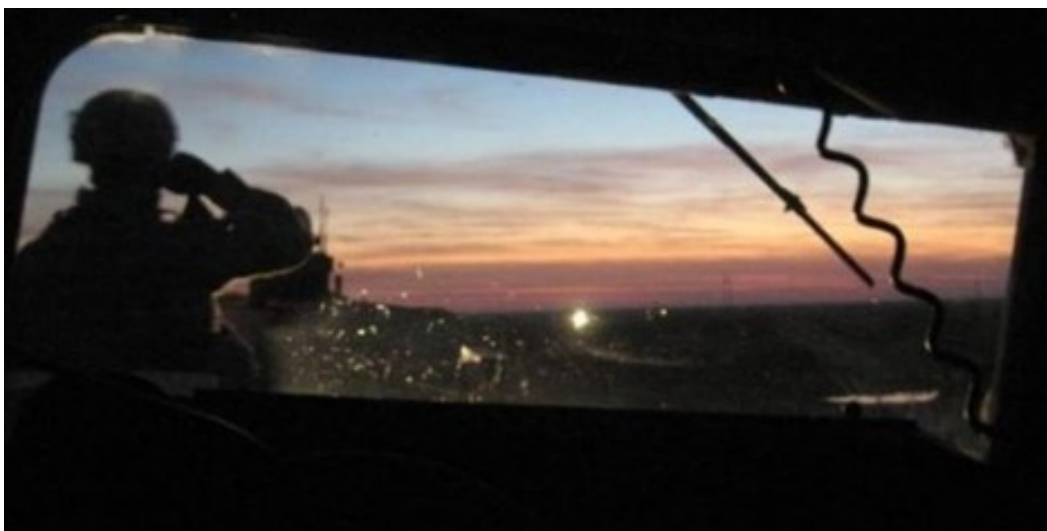
In conjunction with communication standards, the military significantly emphasizes leadership development. Through various robust training programs and mentorship opportunities, service members are thoroughly prepared to assume leadership roles within their units. This focus on leadership is essential for ensuring mission success while fostering a strong sense of responsibility and accountability among personnel. By developing robust leadership qualities within its ranks, the military creates a culture of excellence and professionalism that distinctly sets it apart from other organizations. Ultimately, this commitment to communication, teamwork, and leadership is fundamental to the military's capacity to execute its missions effectively and protect national interests.

The rigid, value-driven military culture profoundly influences and shapes the moral intuitions of military personnel (Howe & Bisel, 2024). Research in moral psychology has demonstrated that assessments of moral beliefs can predict a wide range of behaviors, including electoral participation, resource conservation, and infidelity in intimate relationships. Based on this foundational work, Howe and Bisel (2024) have developed a scale to measure military veterans' moral emotions toward civilians. The Veteran Contempt for Civilian Communication (VCCC) instrument exhibits reliability and consistency with established moral theoretical frameworks. Findings indicate that military

veterans scoring higher on the VCCC encounter notable difficulties navigating romantic relationships and show an increased likelihood of relationship dissolution (Howe & Hartsough, 2024).

This new scale represents a substantial advancement over previous instruments, such as the Military to Civilian Questionnaire (M2CQ), which predominantly employs retrospective assessments and evaluates veterans' challenges only after problematic behaviors have manifested. For example, the M2CQ prompts veterans to reflect on their experiences over the past two weeks and report any issues they have encountered. In contrast, the VCCC serves a predictive role, identifying veterans who may require additional support or training during their reintegration process (Howe & Bisel, 2024; Howe & Hartsough, 2024).

While current research utilizing the VCCC has largely been cross-sectional, longitudinal studies are necessary to establish the long-term applicability of this measurement. This innovative approach challenges traditional paradigms surrounding veteran reintegration by extending the focus beyond psychological factors to incorporate psychological, social, and communicative states influenced by the moral beliefs and values instilled by the USM.



Dr Howe, during combat operations in Iraq

The prevailing treatment paradigms for veterans experiencing trauma related to military service have often relied on the assumption that post-traumatic stress (PTS) is a purely psychological phenomenon. However, emerging research disputes this notion, positing that PTS constitutes a social-emotional issue arising from military interactions during service. Additionally, there is a well-documented association between moral injury and military service, underscoring the necessity of addressing moral beliefs, attitudes, and actions in facilitating veterans' transitions to civilian life—beyond the limitations of psychological treatments alone. Communication scholars increasingly recognize the value of integrating moral beliefs and values into analyses of communication practices and responses among veterans. This shift in perspective emphasizes the critical importance of addressing moral injury alongside traditional psychological interventions to support veterans during their reintegration into society effectively.

This comprehensive approach acknowledges that veterans frequently struggle with complex emotions such as guilt, shame, and betrayal as they navigate the challenges of re-entering civilian life. Providing targeted support to help them reconcile these moral conflicts can assist veterans in achieving a sense of closure and healing. Furthermore, fostering meaningful social connections is vital to their overall wellbeing.

References

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